

## KNOL

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those children up to par, she said.

"I have been beat up about this voucher issue," said Knol, 32, who has taken heat for her endorsement by the Great Lakes Education Project, which includes a state-wide constitutional amendment allowing vouchers on its political agenda. "GLEP is about more than just vouchers."

The legislation enacting vouchers could be written so it only applies to failing school districts, Knol said. "What we need to figure out is how we will implement it. A lot of people are beating up Proposal A, but it has increased funding for schools. We spend 40 percent of the state's budget on education and we still have failing school districts."

Knol hadn't read the USA Today article that reported Hillsdale Elementary School, a national Blue Ribbon Exemplary School in Farmington Hills, as a "failing school" on a federal list released this summer.

She also hadn't seen a Brookings Institute study calling charter schools underperforming.

But Knol went to work at Johnson Controls after her interview, hopped on the internet and was back at the Farmington Observer office at 9:30 p.m. with responses on these issues.

"I hate not knowing," she said.

## CHARTERS

Knol supports charter schools as long as they remain public schools. Charters are public schools of choice that have signed an agreement with the state to improve education often by unconventional means.

"The question is are they accountable?" Knol said. "I believe they are. I see evidence that it is causing public schools to improve because of that competition for students. You won't see charter schools pop up in Farmington/Farmington Schools because we have a good school district. They will pop up where you have a need, where you have failing school districts."

In 1999, Oakland International Academy, a charter school, started in a building leased at Mercy Center, 28650 11 Mile Road, next to the William Costick Activities Center. The school is authorized by Saginaw Valley State University.

Principal Fatimah Jakri, acknowledged the school started even though Farmington Public School District is doing well.

USA Today recently reported a Brookings Institute study, billed as the first independent study of charter schools' performance, which found that during 1999-2000, charter schools fell significantly below public schools in the U.S. in reading and math skills. The group looked at 376 charter schools in 10 states, including Michigan.

## ENVIRONMENT

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Marianne Hellebuyck. The commission will suggest planting sites in a variety of public areas and parks, and will make recommendations for appropriate tree species.

Prices vary according to the trees selected and optional permanent plaques are available at an additional cost.

The most recent dedication, on Oct. 5, celebrated Michelle House's scholastic endeavors and was donated by her mother, Dorothy. The gingko tree was planted at the corner of State and Liberty streets.

Mrs. House also plans to dedicate a tree in Shiawassee Park for Archie Ramsey, and a tree will be dedicated in honor of former councilman Bill Hartsock's years of government service.

The commission, which held its annual Beautification Awards last week, is actively seeking new members.

For more information on any program or to volunteer, call Hyaka at (248) 477-5117.

It found 59 percent of students at traditional public schools scored better than charter school students during the period studied.

Knol cited material from the Center for Education Reform, a conservative think tank, which called the Brookings study "inconclusive." She pointed to specific sections of the report which said charter schools attract large numbers of students who are struggling academically in regular public school.

"In fact, the researchers concurred with previous findings that charters serve a higher proportion of black students (23 percent versus 17 percent

nationally) and Hispanic students (18 percent versus 15 percent). About 25 percent of the schools studied were new in 1999," the center study said.

## UNIFORM STANDARDS

"You have to have one clear, uniform set of standards for the state," Knol said. "You have to set the curriculum to these standards and the teachers can teach to these standards and measure to these standards. How else do you know they are learning?"

Knol doesn't call the Michigan Education Assessment Program the best test. "The MEAP has to be relat-

ed to standards which we have," she said, saying the state's new letter grade accreditation system is "easy for people to understand. When students take home a paper, it's A, A minus, B plus. It's associated with points. That letter will relate to a scale." Each state should set its own standards, she said.

## DURANT CASE

The Farmington Public School District, like others in the state, wants its fair share of money in connection with the Durant versus State of Michigan.

The class action lawsuit, filed in 1980, claiming underfunding

of programs and a violation of Section 29 of the state constitution known as the Headlee Amendment. This amendment requires the state to fund mandated programs at the same proportion of the state budget when the amendment was adopted in 1978.

The mandated programs involved were special education, special education transportation, school lunch program and driver education.

In July 1997, the Michigan Supreme court ruled that districts were harmed by the underfunding and ordered payment for three years of the 17 years claimed. On April 15, 1998, Farmington received

\$9,496,233 related to this suit.

"I'm not in favor of a Durant Four," Knol said. "We should set up a blue ribbon bipartisan committee with a variety of people to study special education."

She was unsure who should be appointed the committee. "The Department of Education needs to be involved and people from the Legislature. We need to have both interests represented there."

The costs of special education are going up, and while that has to be addressed, Knol realizes parents want the best for their children. "It's an emotional issue," she said.

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